DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 370 315 EC 303 047

AUTHOR	Urbain, Cathleen
TITLE	Supported Employment: A Step-by-Step Guide.
INSTITUTION	PACER Center, Inc., Minneapolis, MN.
SPONS AGENCY	Minnesota State Dept. of Jobs and Training, St. Paul. Div. of Rehabilitation Services.
PUB DATE	92
NOTE	97p.
AVAILABLE FROM	PACER Center 4826 Chicago Ave. South, Minneapolis, MN 55417-1098 ($8 includes postage and handling).
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Adults; *Advocacy; Agency Role; *Change Strategies; Community Programs; *Disabilities; Employment Programs; *Program Development; Public Agencies; Social Services; *Supported Employment; *Vocational Rehabilitation

ABSTRACT

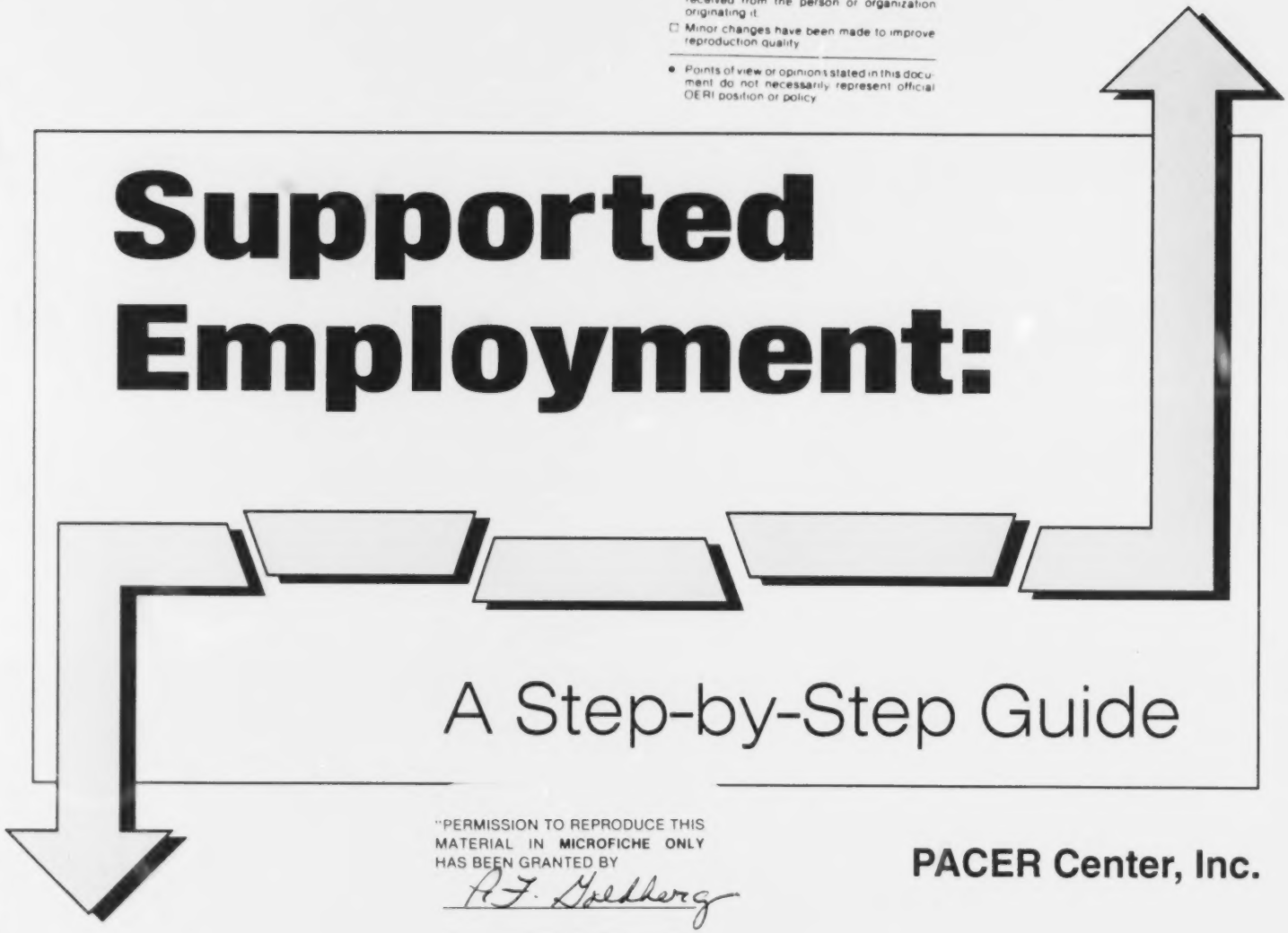
This booklet is intended for individuals with disabilities, their families, friends, and advocates who are interested in supported employment. It begins with a description of the system that provides supported employment, explaining that vocational rehabilitation agencies and social services agencies "buy" supported employment services from direct service agencies. The booklet outlines procedures for requesting services and procedures for determining which services are appropriate, and notes the role of the vocational assessment. It gives tips on obtaining or improving services through career planning, job development, employment support, and integration. The booklet also explains how to obtain supported employment for one person or for many. A section on advocating for an individual points out that individuals should ask both vocational rehabilitation and social services agencies for supported employment, lists questions to ask, and lists strategies for developing effective working relationships. A section on advocating for a community contends that joining with other persons to advocate for systems change may be effective in obtaining supported employment services. It discusses steps involved, including finding persons with similar goals, creating a group, choosing a goal, gathering information, making connections, selecting a strategy, guiding a group, and focusing efforts. (JDD)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 370 315

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

Supported Employment:



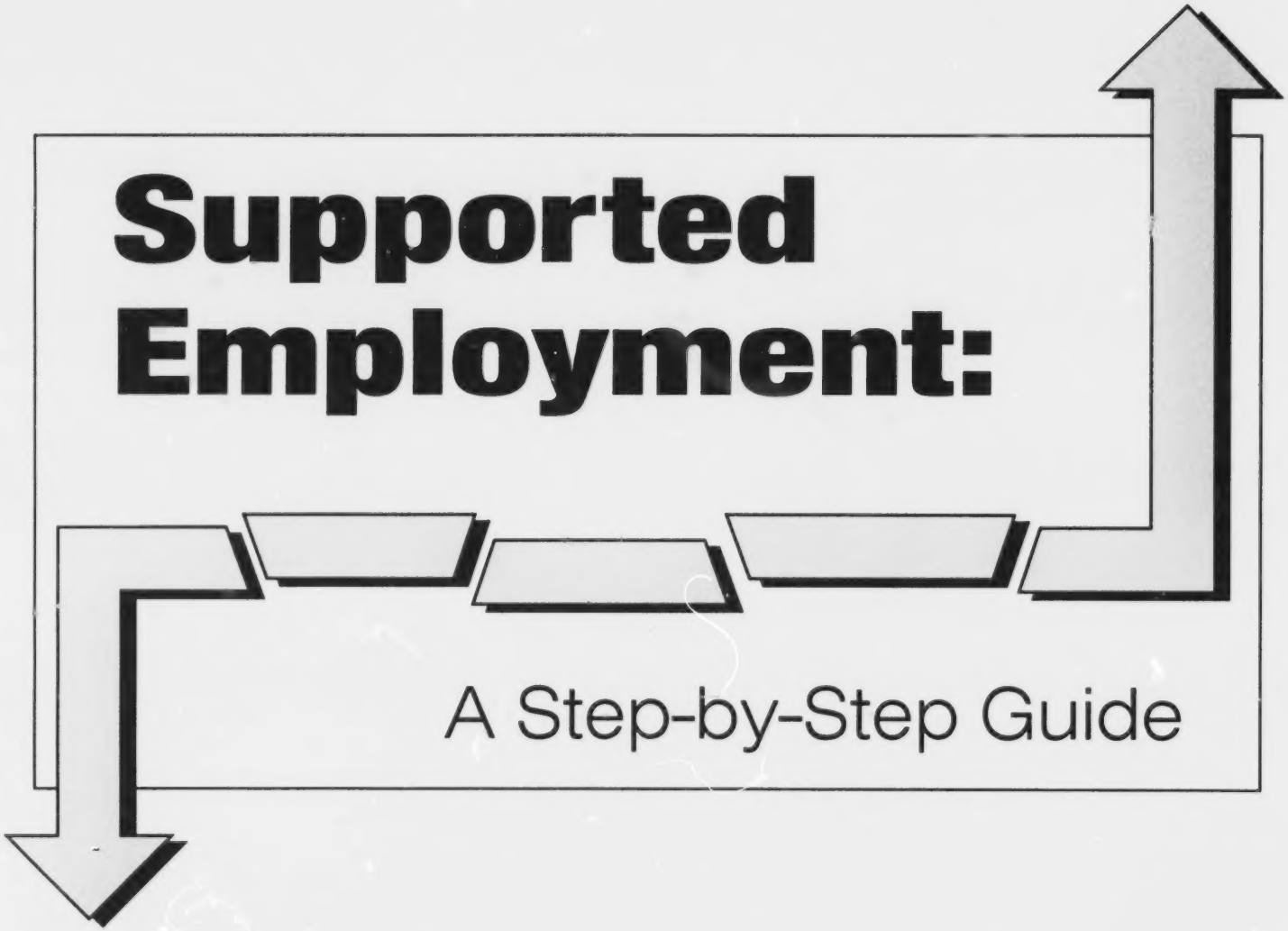
A Step-by-Step Guide

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
A.F. Goldberg
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PACER Center, Inc.

EC 303047

BEST COPY AVAILABLE



Supported Employment:

A Step-by-Step Guide

Credits

Author:	Cathleen Urbain, Ph.D., PACER Center, Inc.
Copy and layout editor:	Jamie Smith, PACER Center, Inc.
Illustrations:	Toni Parrish, with assistance from Cathy Milota, PACER Center, Inc.
Our thanks to:	The many persons from PACER, from Minnesota, and from throughout the country who provided invaluable feedback on early drafts of this booklet

This booklet was developed through a grant funded by the Minnesota Division of Rehabilitation Services.

"Supported Employment: A Step-by-Step Guide" was produced by:

PACER Center, Inc.
4826 Chicago Avenue South
Minneapolis, MN 55417-1098
(612) 827-2966 Voice & TDD

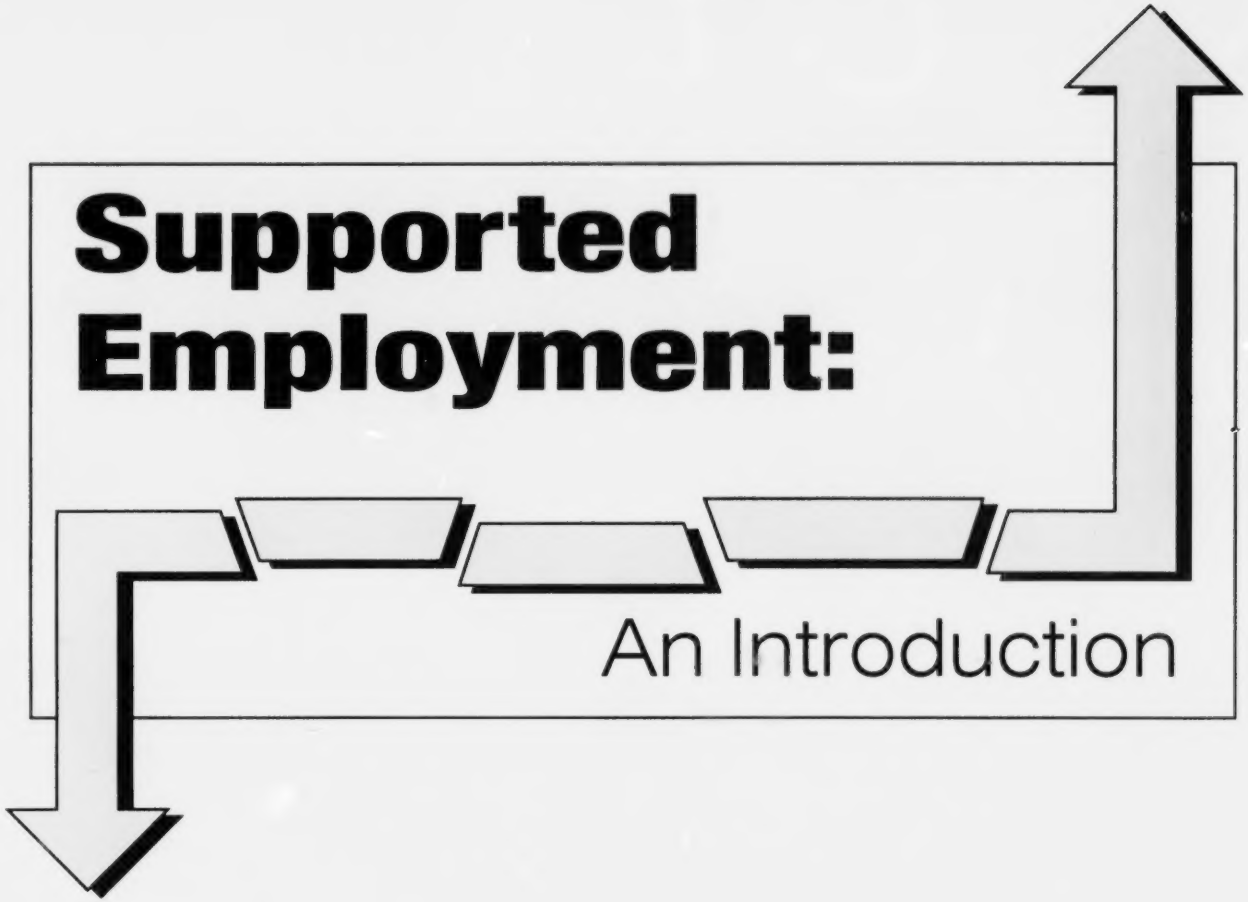
Marge Goldberg, Co-director
Paula Goldberg, Co-director

© 1992, PACER Center, Inc.

PACER CENTER

Table of contents

	Pages
Supported Employment: An Introduction	1, 2
Supported Employment: The Sources	3 to 10
Supported Employment: A Personal Approach	11 to 18
Supported Employment: Advocating for an Individual	19 to 26
Supported Employment: Advocating for a Community	27 to 36
Supported Employment: Final Thoughts	37


Supported
Employment:
An Introduction

An introduction to supported employment

People with severe disabilities are sharing the experiences that a job and the workplace offer — opportunities for growth and independence. By providing supports that meet the needs of a person, supported employment is assisting individuals in becoming successful members of the workforce.

This booklet is for persons who want supported employment. It is intended for individuals with disabilities, their families, friends, and advocates. It explains how to obtain or improve supported employment for one person or for many, and describes the system that provides this service.

Supported employment is part of a civil rights movement nationwide that maintains all persons with disabilities have a right to live and participate in the community. The goal of supported employment is to grant persons who want to work the opportunity to be successfully employed, regardless of the severity of their disability.

An introduction to supported employment

Continued from previous page

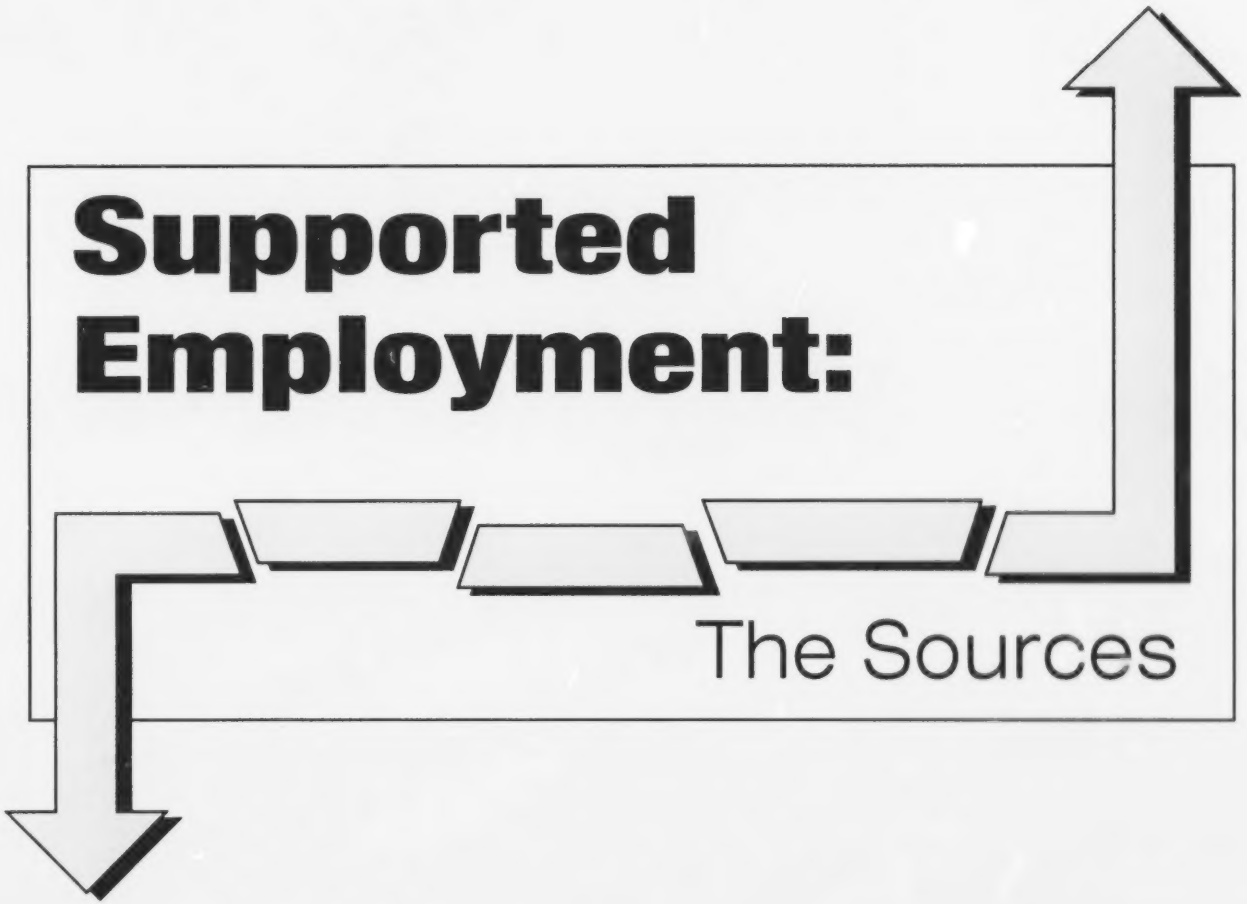
Supported employment is for adults:

- who traditionally have not been considered part of the workforce;
- who need long-term support to be employed;
- who have one or more disabilities, such as mental retardation, autism, mental illness, traumatic brain injury, physical disabilities, or severe behavioral challenges.

Supported employment is:

- a job with pay at a business in the community;
- a job in which a person is interested;
- a job that can be part-time, full-time, or shared;
- a job that matches a person's ***CURRENT*** skills, interests, and support needs.

This booklet first explains the system that provides supported employment, and then describes practices that improve the quality of this service. The final sections give tips on obtaining or improving supported employment — for an individual, and for a community. Throughout the booklet, it is assumed that persons with disabilities or their representatives have the right to be involved in all decisions regarding the type, quality and source of services they are offered.


Supported
Employment:
The Sources

Who provides supported employment?

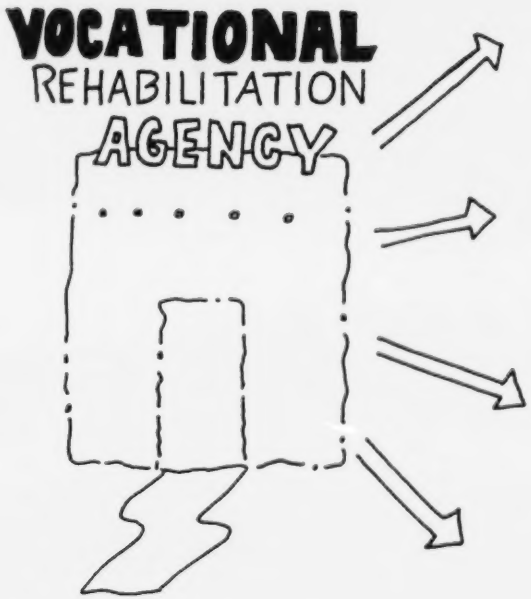
There are two types of organizations involved in providing supported employment services for an individual — those that *BUY* the service and those that *DELIVER* the service.

The organizations that *BUY* supported employment are the vocational rehabilitation agency and the social service agency. The two agencies must often combine their funds to pay for supported employment for an individual.

Direct service agencies *DELIVER* supported employment and are the organizations from which vocational rehabilitation and social service agencies buy this service. Direct service agencies help an individual find a job and stay employed.

What services does a vocational rehabilitation agency purchase?

The role of the vocational rehabilitation agency is to help persons with disabilities find employment. The services the agency buys must be employment-related.



medical, psychological, and vocational evaluations

transitional and supported employment

transportation, minimum income for basic living expenses, interpreter and note-taking services — as needed to participate in other vocational rehabilitation services

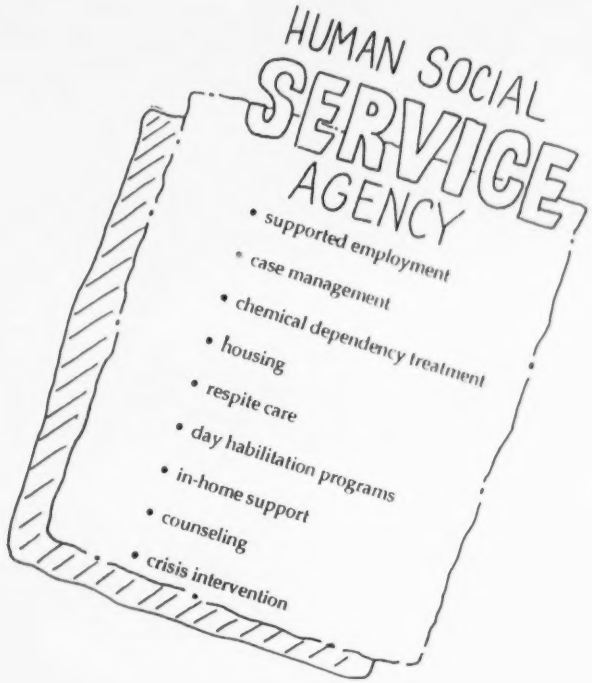
assistance in adapting work settings

aids to increase a person's ability to work, such as communication boards or motorized chairs

tools, equipment, licenses to start a person in business

What services does a social service agency purchase?

Employment-related services are one of the many kinds of services a social service agency can purchase to meet the day-to-day living needs of persons with disabilities. The range of services available from a social service agency differs according to the nature and severity of an individual's disability.



How does a person request services?

The process for getting services from the local vocational rehabilitation or social service agency is similar. On the first request, an agency representative is assigned to determine whether the person with the disability has service needs that can be met by the agency. Within the vocational rehabilitation agency, this person is called the vocational rehabilitation counselor. Within the social service agency, the person is referred to as a case manager or social worker.

If the person with a disability is a high school student receiving special education services, school personnel should arrange for a case manager and/or vocational counselor to participate in the individual's transition planning.* A person who has finished school and doesn't have a counselor or case manager should make service requests directly to the vocational rehabilitation and/or social service agency listed in the local phone book.

A person can appeal a decision by either funding agency that denies eligibility for services.

* Transition Planning

All students receiving special education services have an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Skills to live, work, and be part of the community after graduation need to be included in the student's IEP from age 16 through graduation (age 14 through graduation in Minnesota). Services a student will need as an adult from vocational rehabilitation, social service, and other agencies must be arranged before school is completed. Transition planning is required by special education law.

What determines the services a person receives?

Once a person's needs are identified, the counselor or case manager prepares a written plan listing the services the agency agrees to purchase. Within the vocational rehabilitation agency, this plan is called the Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP), and within the social service agency, the Individual Service Plan (ISP). Individuals with disabilities or their legal guardian(s)* should involve themselves in decisions about what services are included in the plan.

The written plan is an agreement between the individual receiving services and the agency purchasing services. When it's agreed the plan is acceptable, it must be signed by the individual with disabilities or her or his legal guardian. Plans should be reviewed yearly. Changes require the written consent of the individual or guardian, who should always keep a copy of the current plan.

The vocational counselor and/or case manager is responsible for coordinating and monitoring the quality of services listed in a written plan.

* Legal Guardian

Once individuals reach age 18, their parents' signature on agreements concerning them is not legally valid. The courts must determine if persons are unable to make decisions in some or all areas of their lives. If so, the court appoints family members or other persons as guardians or partial guardians (conservators) for individuals.

How does a person obtain supported employment services?

A person requesting services from a vocational rehabilitation or social service agency should actively participate in decisions the agency makes about needs and types of services to be purchased. Employment in the community is a need that must be addressed, and supported employment should be listed in the written plan as a service to be purchased.

Which needs are identified and what services are offered should be based on the individual, not on what services the vocational rehabilitation or social service agency is accustomed to buying. A person can appeal an agency's refusal to recognize a need or to purchase a particular service.

How is a vocational assessment involved?

Vocational counselors frequently purchase a vocational assessment to identify a person's work skills. Vocational assessments, however, often result in a list of work skills an individual ***does not*** have, and serve to eliminate community employment as an option for the person.

A person seeking supported employment should be sure that the vocational assessment the counselor includes in the IWRP:

- assumes the person is going to work in the community;
- identifies types of supports an individual needs to be successfully employed;
- focuses on the person's strengths and interests;
- examines a range of jobs and work settings;
- provides information not already available from school records or other sources.

What is the role of the direct service agency?

Vocational rehabilitation and social service agencies buy supported employment from direct service agencies. The role of the direct service agency is to help a person find and keep a job in the community.

Direct service agencies have job developers who find jobs in the community, and job coaches who provide support to help an individual be a successful employee. The direct service agency is responsible for arranging a reliable method for a person to get to and from a job site.

Rehabilitation Facilities (formerly called sheltered workshops) and Developmental Achievement Centers (DACs) are the two most common types of direct service agencies that provide supported employment. Direct service agencies vary in the kinds of supported employment services they provide. Individuals or their guardians should visit direct service agencies that provide supported employment, and work with the vocational counselor and/or case manager in deciding which agency to include in the written plan.

The needs of the individual, not the preferences of a vocational counselor or case manager, should determine the selection of the direct service agency to include in the written plan.

Supported
Employment:
A Personal Approach

What increases the chance of successful employment?

Successful employment is more likely when a job matches a person's interests and skills, and when co-workers accept the person as a member of the team. For these things to happen, it is important to examine four parts of the supported employment process.

1. Career planning. How are the person's interests and needs for support determined?

2. Job development. How is a potential job for a person selected?

3. Employment support. What kind of job supports are provided, and how?

4. Integration. What is done to help the person become part of the workplace?

Career planning

A career plan assumes a person is going to work in the community. It is a positive statement about what a person can do, and it is a source of strategies to help the person secure a job, keep a job, and reach her/his employment goals.

Career planning gathers information from a wide variety of sources about a person's:

- likes and dislikes;
- skills;
- learning style;
- prior work experience or training;
- employment goals;
- support needs for holding a job.

The plan also addresses:

- concerns a person has about holding a job;
- shortages in community services or resources.

A career plan suggests:

- ideal characteristics of a job and job setting;
- potential sources for jobs;
- support techniques for use by employers, co-workers, and job coaches.

Career planning

Continued from previous page

A vocational assessment can be one source of information in career planning. It should never be the sole basis on which choices about types of jobs are made.

The career plan often looks at situations beyond the employment setting — situations that affect a person's ability to be employed. The plan might look at providing the person a place to live, leisure activities, counseling or medical services, and training in skills needed to take part in the community or to live as independentiy as possible.

Anyone can call a career planning session — a person with a disability, the person's family or friends, a vocational counselor, social service case manager, or job developer. The session includes the person with a disability and people important in her or his life.

Because a person's interests and support needs change, it is important for the team to regularly review the career plan.

Job development

The kinds of employment a job developer seeks for a person should be based on the individual's skills, interests and support needs. Because a job should fit the individual, a job search should not be limited to companies with which the direct service agency already has agreements to hire.

Here are examples of job development fitting the individual:

An individual may want a particular job, but not have the skills to perform it. A job developer could then try to meet the person's interests through the work setting.

- A person wants to work with animals, but is unable to handle them directly. The person could, however, carry out office duties or janitorial work in a veterinarian's office.

A person's need for support may lead a job developer to seek certain work settings.

- An office in a hospital or nursing home might be a job site for an individual with medical support needs.

The nature or location of the work setting may be more important to a person's success than the particular task.

- A job developer should seek a quiet environment for a person who is distracted or agitated by noise.
- Current lack of transportation may require that employment be within walking distance of a person's home.

If there are currently no jobs existing that meet a person's skills and interests, a job developer could suggest a company create a job.

- Noticing that secretaries waste valuable time making photocopies, the job developer might suggest that the employer could save money by creating a position of photocopier.

A job developer could request that a job be divided between two people (one or both of whom have disabilities) if the individual is unable to:

- do all parts of a job; work fast enough; or do the job for the length of time needed.

Employment support

A person with severe disabilities, with appropriate supports, can be successfully employed.

The kinds of support depend upon the needs of the individual. Supports can be provided on the job or away from the job. They can range from a simple change in work procedure to the use of a high-technology device. A job coach can directly provide the support, or can assist co-workers and supervisors in providing support to the employee.

Examples of employment support are:

- A person with mental retardation may need to have job tasks taught in small steps by a person working alongside her.
- A person with mental illness may need to release stress during the day so the job won't be overwhelming, and can discuss the need after work hours with the individual providing him job support.
- A person with traumatic brain injury unable to judge whether her performance is adequate may need daily meetings with a supervisor to receive direct feedback.
- A person who has difficulty completing duties on time might use a clock with pictures of tasks in place of numbers to guide what he should be doing at what time.
- A person who drools could have a glass plate placed over the work space.
- A person in a wheelchair could do housekeeping at a hotel by having a vacuum mounted to the bottom of the wheelchair.
- A person who is able to control neck motions might use a head strap with a light beam to operate a computer.

Employment support

Continued from previous page

Job-related skills are general skills needed in the worksite to interact with others and be a responsible employee. The direct service agency is responsible for teaching these skills or arranging for them to be taught.

Job-related skills can include:

- arriving at work on time;
- asking for help;
- accepting constructive criticism;
- expressing anger appropriately;
- taking prescribed medication regularly;
- being well-groomed;
- using public transportation;
- being trustworthy with company and co-worker property.

Employment support

Continued from previous page

Long-term support is more than helping a person keep a particular job. It is helping a person remain part of the workforce.

Long-term support is unique to supported employment. It addresses issues related to keeping or improving a specific job, such as:

- assistance in learning a new bus route to work;
- assistance in maintaining quality work performance;
- advocacy with a new manager who is fearful of working with a person with a disability;
- assistance in receiving a promotion or raise in pay;
- assistance in being accepted by co-workers.

Long-term support is important when:

- a person for whom a job is not a good match, or who has been laid off or fired, wants another job;
- a person who is successfully employed wishes to change jobs to increase her or his responsibilities or learn new skills;
- a person without a work history wants experience with different work settings and different work tasks.

The vocational rehabilitation and social service agencies must agree to pay for finding a new job and training the person to do the job. The agencies often are willing to purchase these services only in situations of a poor job match or lay-off. It may be necessary to advocate for these services when a person is fired or chooses to leave a job to gain experience or increased responsibility.

Integration

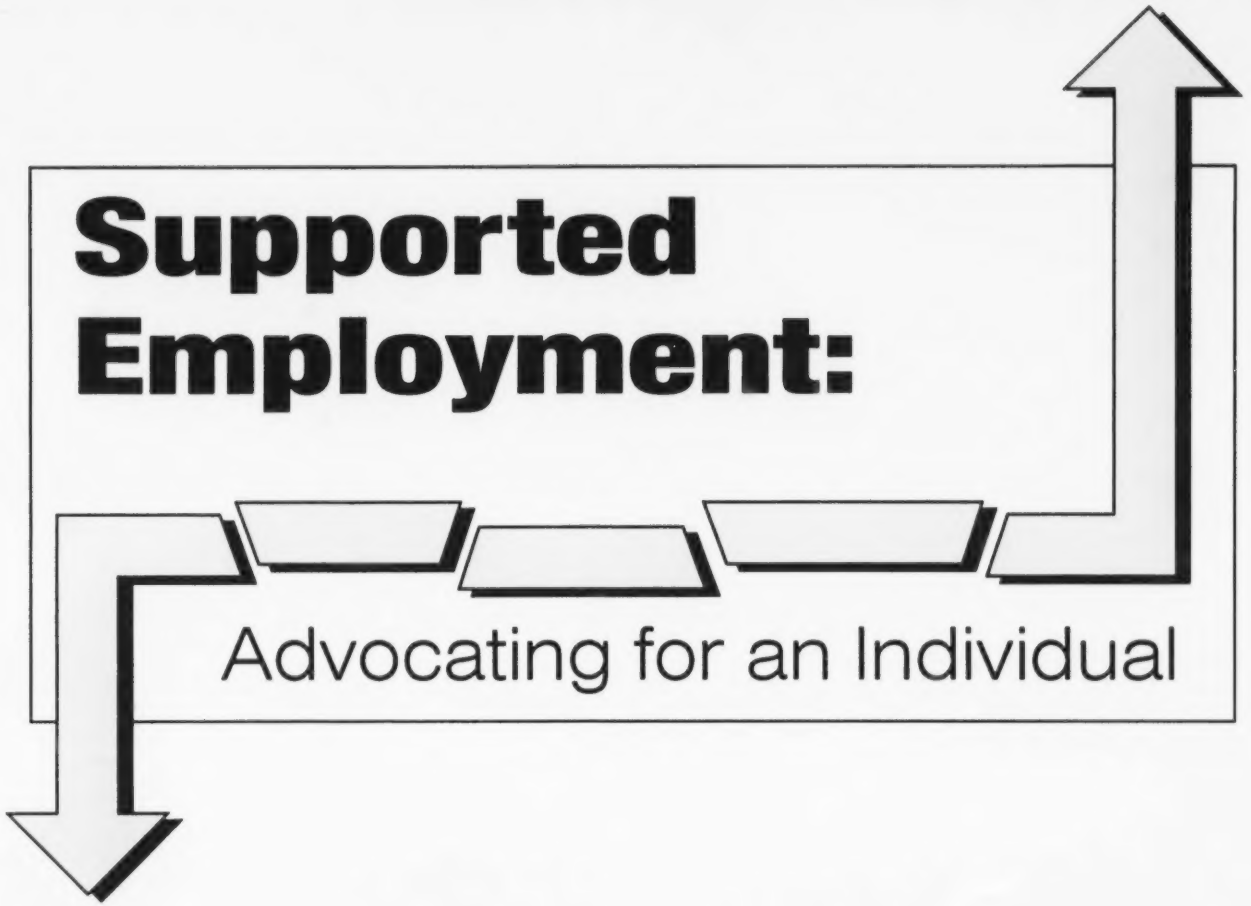
Inclusion as part of the team by co-workers is an important goal of supported employment.

Depending on the support needs of the individual, a job coach could help co-workers learn about each other by:

- pointing out common likes and dislikes;
- teaching methods for communication;
- explaining a person's learning style;
- answering questions about the nature of a disability;
- explaining a person's medical supports.

A job coach should provide information and training to co-workers and supervisors so they can:

- help the employee learn job tasks;
- help the employee learn job-related behaviors;
- be comfortable in responding to unexpected behaviors;
- assist in creating job adaptations;
- maintain long-term support.


Supported
Employment:
Advocating for an Individual

Should a person with severe disabilities ask a vocational rehabilitation agency for supported employment?

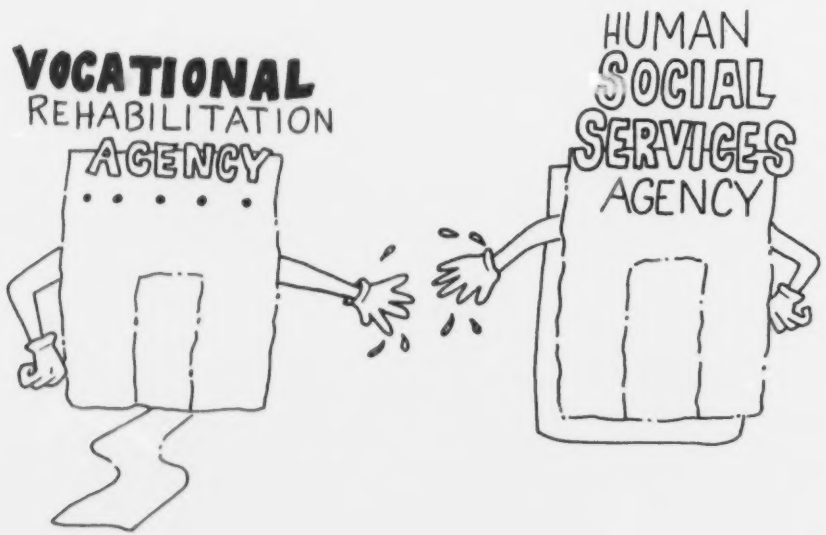
Yes, a person with severe disabilities should request supported employment from the vocational rehabilitation agency. Request supported employment even if the agency has usually provided services only for persons with mild to moderate disabilities.

For a person to be eligible for services, there must be a reasonable expectation that the services provided will result in a person's being employed. In the past, this requirement resulted in vocational rehabilitation agencies serving persons with less severe disabilities. Now that supported employment is recognized as a legitimate employment outcome, no person should be denied supported employment from a vocational rehabilitation agency based on severity of disability.

Why should a person ask both funding agencies for supported employment?

For the most part, vocational rehabilitation agencies can purchase only time-limited services for an individual. For supported employment, this often means paying for services like a vocational assessment, preparation of a resume, job development, or initial on-the-job support.

Other funding sources must be used to purchase long-term support services that are the heart of supported employment. Social service agencies are the usual source of this money. (In Minnesota and a few other states, the vocational rehabilitation agency has some funds to pay for long-term support.)



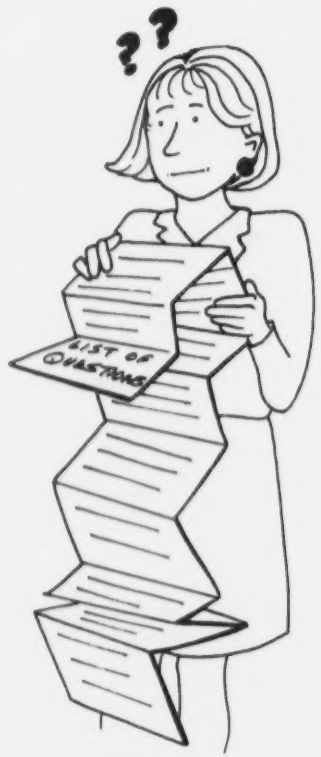
What should a person ask a vocational counselor or case manager about supported employment?

Because vocational counselors and case managers choose what services their agencies purchase, it is important to know what they see as employment goals for an individual. Ask them:

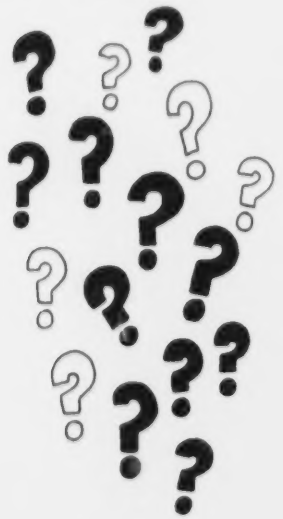
- whether they believe the individual can hold a job in the community, and if so, what kind, and when;
- what support services they are willing to buy, and from which direct service agencies.

When working with a counselor or case manager as part of a high school transition team, find out if she or he is willing to arrange for the student to move directly into a job after completing school.

Request a different counselor or case manager if she or he does not agree with the employment goals, does not work effectively with the individual, or fails to carry out responsibilities. The request and reasons for making it should be in writing, and should be sent to the counseling supervisor at the local office of the vocational rehabilitation or social service agency.



What questions should a person ask a direct service agency?



Visit direct service agencies to learn what kinds of supported employment services they provide. This information will help in the discussion of which agencies and services should be included in the Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP) or the Individual Service Plan (ISP).

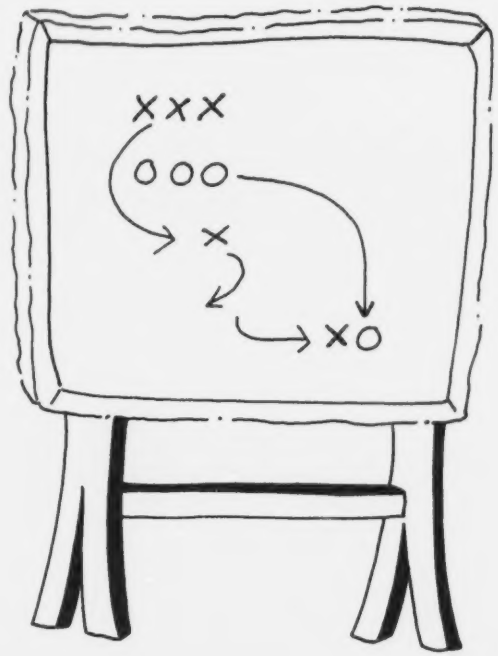
Ask the direct service agency:

- what kinds of jobs it has found for individuals;
- if career planning is used as the basis for job development;
- what are the average wages, hours worked per week, and length of employment of persons in supported employment;
- what services it provides when a person is laid off or fired or is unable to work a full work day;
- what arrangements it makes for transportation;
- the average length of time it takes to find a person a job;
- how it facilitates integration in the worksite;
- the nature and severity of the disabilities of the persons for whom it has found community employment;
- whether it finds individual jobs for a person or places groups of persons with disabilities at a job site;
- the kind and frequency of training it provides its job developers and job coaches, and their average length of employment.

What are strategies for developing effective working relationships?

Despite the best of intentions, time and funding constraints may prevent counselors, case managers and personnel from direct service agencies from fully addressing the needs of an individual. To increase the attention they give to a person, it helps to:

- maintain regular contact with the counselor, case manager, or representative of the direct service agency;
- stay informed about service options and rights;
- follow through on requests for service;
- thank the counselors, case managers or direct service providers for their efforts;
- acknowledge successes;
- approach disagreements in a problem-solving fashion, focusing on goals and shared values.



What should a person *SAY* when the answer is no?

Always try to work together toward a solution. In the end, however, it is not the responsibility of the person making the request to determine how to make supported employment available. The most effective response to a "no" is to repeat, repeat, repeat the request.

"There is no money."

Any service costs money. The issue is what services the funding agency chooses to buy. Community employment is the trend for the future. It is in the best interest of the agency to promote effective, creative supported employment services.

"The direct service agency in the community does not offer supported employment."

A funding agency can require supported employment services in its contract with a direct service agency. If an agency is unable to offer supported employment, the funding agency can select another direct service agency, or attract a new agency into the community from other areas of the state.

"The severity of the person's disabilities prevents employment."

By definition, supported employment is for persons with severe disabilities. No one is to be denied the opportunity for employment based on disability. Direct service agencies can receive training on how to provide supports for persons with severe disabilities.

"A job is available, but the individual must:

- **have her or his own transportation,**
- **first learn a skill, or,**
- **have a behavior or medical condition under control."**

It is the responsibility of the direct service agency to find a job that meets an individual's current skills and support needs. Can someone provide a ride? Is there a job setting where the behavior would not be disruptive?

"There are no jobs available in the community."

Has the job developer suggested the creation of a new job within a company to meet a business need? Has the direct service agency talked with other agencies in similar communities for ideas in finding, restructuring, or creating jobs? Would the agency provide support on a job found by the individual with a disability or her or his friends?

What should a person *DO* when the answer is no

Put the request in writing, and proceed to the next level. This could mean approaching a supervisor or the source of funding for an agency. Ask that reasons for denial of service be put in writing. Keep copies of all correspondence, as well as notes about important conversations.

When informal methods fail to result in agreement, an appeal process is available within vocational rehabilitation and social service agencies. The agencies are required to notify applicants of their appeal rights. Decisions that can be appealed include:

- denial of eligibility for agency services;
- refusal to provide a requested service;
- cutback in services being received;
- failure to provide agreed-upon services in a timely or effective manner.

Is help available in making requests for supported employment?

State and local disability advocacy organizations can provide information and assistance to persons having difficulty with their supported employment requests. Check for local or state offices of Arcs or Parent Training and Information Centers, or inquire about organizations representing individual disabilities (cerebral palsy, epilepsy, autism, head injury, mental illness, etc.). The organizations can provide:

- strategies for pursuing supported employment;
- information about rules that govern the type and quality of vocational services that must be provided, and for whom;
- contacts with other families or persons with disabilities wanting similar services;
- names of persons within the vocational rehabilitation, social service, and direct service systems who could be good resources.

Each state must have a Client Assistance Project (CAP) to help persons request services or appeal decisions of the vocational rehabilitation agency. States must designate one or more organizations to provide protection and advocacy for persons requesting services or appealing decisions of the social service agency. Within Minnesota, the Minnesota Disability Law Center is designated to provide the Client Assistance Project, Legal Advocacy for Persons with Developmental Disabilities, and the Mental Health Law Project.

Supported
Employment:
Advocating for a Community

Advocating as a group

What can you do when, on your own, you have tried all available routes to obtain supported employment, and none have worked?

You can join with other persons seeking supported employment for their family members or for themselves and work as a group to receive this service. Advocating as a group means advocating for systems change — change that affects many persons.

Advocating as a group provides:

- a pool of ideas, skills, and community connections;
- a forum to exchange information, clarify issues, and increase self-confidence;
- a source of energy and support;
- the power of numbers that makes a request for supported employment more difficult to ignore.

Contact a variety of disability advocacy organizations to find out if a group of families and/or persons with disabilities is already advocating for supported employment in your community. The wider the range of disabilities represented among persons asking for supported employment, the harder it is for the request to be denied.

Finding persons to join you

If a group seeking supported employment does not already exist in the community, try to locate persons with disabilities and their families with whom you can work.

- Prepare a notice describing your goals and requesting that people join you.
- Ask teachers, vocational counselors, case managers, and direct service agency staff who share your goals to send the notice to families of people they serve.
- Send the notice to religious and community organizations for inclusion in their bulletins or for posting on their information boards.
- Attend meetings of people likely to share your concerns, such as school programs for families of special education high school students, or meetings of local chapters of disability advocacy organizations. Ask for time during the meeting to make an announcement, or talk with people during the coffee break.
- Write a letter to the editor of your newspaper, or ask a reporter from the local paper, radio or cable television station to prepare a story describing the changes you want and requesting people contact you for further information.

Creating a group

At the first meeting of a group, find out the main reason each person came. Common reasons include:

- to receive information on current vocational services;
- to seek emotional support;
- to change current vocational services.

To have an effective supported employment group, the majority of members must have a desire to change vocational services as their main reason for joining. The majority must also be willing to give time and energy to advocate for change. A person can gain emotional support and information on current services while working with others to obtain supported employment.

Choosing a goal

Persons in the group who want to change current vocational services must clarify where they wish to focus energy.

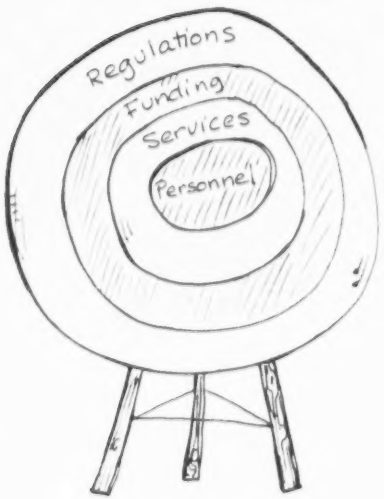
Do group members want supported employment made available, or improved, for persons with a particular type or severity of disability? For persons of a certain age group? For persons receiving services from a particular direct service agency?

What specific improvements in supported employment do group members want? Desired changes might include:

- a greater variety of jobs;
- more input by the individual with a disability and her or his family into the type of job;
- a shorter waiting period before placement on a job;
- jobs for an individual rather than a group of individuals with disabilities;
- more opportunities for job exploration and advancement.

Individuals will stay active only as long as the group works to achieve changes they want. The group must decide how different goals fit together and choose actions that draw together the individual interests of group members.

Gathering information



Once a group has selected a goal, it must determine how to reach it. To choose what actions to take, the group must have basic information about the system it wants to change. For example:

PERSONNEL: What are the administrative positions within the direct service organizations, and within the local and state vocational rehabilitation and social service agencies? Who holds these positions, and what are their responsibilities? Which local and state elected officials make funding and policy decisions affecting vocational programs?

SERVICES: Exactly what community-based and in-house employment services are currently available, and how many people are in each? How many people are waiting for community-based services?

FUNDING: What streams of money do vocational rehabilitation and social service agencies have with which to buy vocational services, and how much money is spent on each kind of service? What outcomes do the vocational rehabilitation and social service agencies require in the funding contracts they have with direct service organizations?

REGULATIONS: What do state and federal programming and funding rules require in vocational services? Are model programs or funding schemes currently being tried as part of upcoming changes to state rules?

The questions to ask in each of these four areas — PERSONNEL, SERVICES, FUNDING, REGULATIONS — depend on the goals of the group. It is not necessary to have all the answers before taking action. But the group should keep in mind that each of these areas determines the availability and quality of supported employment.

Making connections

The group needs working relationships with people that make decisions affecting the availability and quality of supported employment. Gathering information about personnel, services, funding, and regulations is a constructive way to start building these connections. Individuals can be interviewed in their offices or invited to speak to the entire group.

By talking with decision-makers, you can find out:

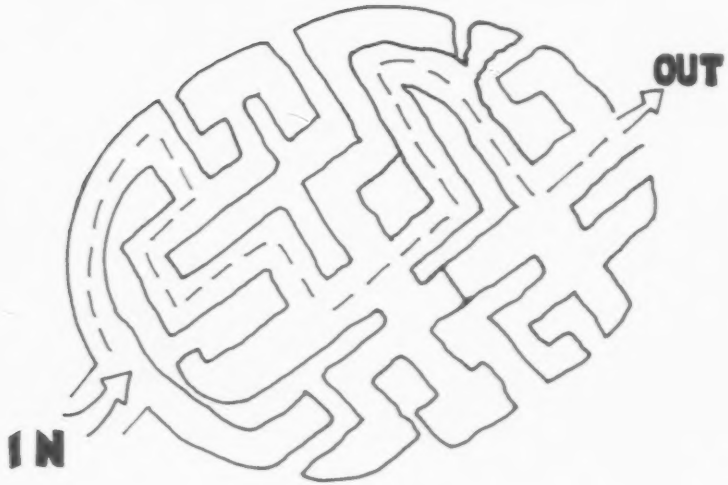
- issues and constraints they face;
- an agency's future directions and timelines;
- whether they understand your concerns;
- whether they agree with your goals;
- their personal styles and values;
- their opinions on what prevents the changes you want;
- roadblocks faced by past efforts at change;
- ways you can work together to reach common goals.

By bringing the group to the attention of decision-makers, they become aware that there are people organized who want similar changes and who want a voice in decisions about vocational services. If the decision-makers agree with the group's goals, they may serve as sources of information and support.

Selecting a strategy

In the process of gathering information about personnel, services, funding, and regulations, the group will become aware of places within the service system to focus its actions. In selecting targets for its actions, the group should consider:

- deadlines for a particular action;
- likelihood of success;
- potential impact.

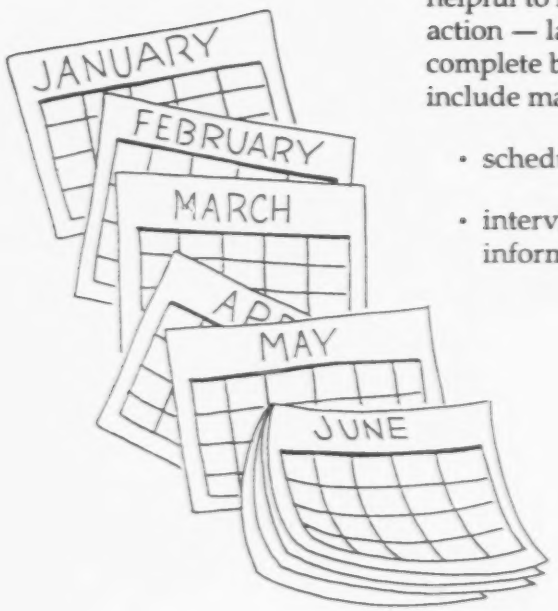


Members must also decide which tactics to use in moving toward their goals, such as:

- private or public meetings;
- letter writing;
- media coverage;
- demonstrations;
- coalition building.

The selection of both targets and tactics must be based on group members' time limits, skills and preferences, connections to decision-makers and sources of information, and access to necessary resources.

Guiding a group



Every meeting should have an agenda listing the time allowed to discuss each item. Someone should keep the group on schedule and guide discussion so that everyone has input. Discussions should focus on solutions rather than criticisms, and on constructive strategies for change.

To create energy and commitment, it is helpful to have each member identify an action — large or small — she or he will complete by the next meeting. Actions can include many things, such as:

- scheduling an appointment;
- interviewing someone for specific information;
- reading an article;
- writing a letter;
- viewing a vocational program;
- finding another person to join the group.

Working in pairs, or checking on another's progress before the next meeting, makes it more likely actions will be completed. Time should be allowed on every agenda for each person to quickly report on the completion — or lack of completion — of an action.

Before ending one meeting, decide the date and location of the next meeting, the content of the agenda, and the person responsible for each agenda item. As the date approaches, remind people of the meeting and the action they had agreed to take.

Focusing efforts

Certain areas might present roadblocks as a group advocates for supported employment. It's important to examine each area to help group members clarify their actions.

FUNDING for supported employment can come from federal, state and local governments. Many decisions about how these dollars are spent are made at local and state levels. Influence decisions by attending public hearings on funding. Lobby state and local elected officials and funding agency administrators, and speak to the individuals on whom they depend for spending recommendations.

RULES/REGULATIONS make a general law specific. They define how a law should be carried out in different situations. Identify individuals within state vocational rehabilitation and social service agencies who write and enforce these regulations. They can be valuable sources of information on what a law requires.

POLICY is a set of written guidelines, based on an agency's interpretation of rules and regulations. Policy can be changed by lobbying administrators.

TRADITION develops from beliefs that have existed long enough and among enough people in an agency that they are assumed to be fact or policy. Challenge tradition by presenting data, educating, and asserting pressure on administrators.

PERSONNEL differ in their openness to change. Conserve energy by identifying people within an agency who agree with the group's goals and are resources for information or support. Try to influence individuals who disagree with you by talking with the people on whom they depend for information or funding.

Some tips

Hold firmly to your belief in the rights of persons with severe disabilities to be part of their communities.

Establish the group's credibility by being knowledgeable, honest, reliable and fair.

Focus on gathering information rather than pressing the group's requests in initial contacts with a decision-maker. Listening helps build trust and establish positive lines of communication.

Identify who in a system provides information for decisions. Elected officials and administrators often base decisions on recommendations from others.

Increase the group's influence by creating alliances across disabilities and with groups outside the disability community.

Communicate with interest groups opposing changes you are seeking in order to find a common ground.

Assume cooperation, not confrontation. Interact respectfully with a person blocking change. Separate the person from the issue. Find common ground and work together toward a solution.

Represent your interests firmly and persistently while recognizing competing interests must be addressed.

Supported
Employment:
Final Thoughts

Final thoughts

Supported employment is a major avenue to inclusion of persons with disabilities in their communities. As a service, it also reflects the growing conviction by persons with disabilities and their families that they have the right to be involved in decisions affecting the quality of their lives.

Supported employment is challenging the reason society gives for the extraordinarily high unemployment rate among persons with severe disabilities. No longer can it be said a person is unemployed because of the severity of her or his disability. Rather, a person is unemployed because systems serving adults with disabilities have not learned how to provide employment supports, or have not devoted adequate resources to doing so.

We will be pleased if this booklet helps you obtain or improve supported employment. Everyone benefits when all persons have access to employment. Persons with severe disabilities are afforded the growth opportunities that accompany employment, and the workforce benefits from the diversity in employees.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

About PACER

PACER Center is a statewide nonprofit organization that serves families of children and adults with disabilities. PACER works through the coalition efforts of families representing 19 disability organizations. The Center's mission is to expand and improve opportunities that enhance the quality of life for children and adults with disabilities.

Staffed primarily by parents of youth with disabilities and individuals with disabilities themselves, PACER carries out the philosophy of "Parents Helping Parents" through workshops, individual assistance, and written information.

Related material

Other materials related to supported employment and transition are available from PACER Center. Among them are:

- "Opportunity Knocking: The Story of Supported Employment," an overview of the basics of supported employment.
- "A Reference Manual for Parent Training About Supported Employment," a topical listing of resources on supported employment and related issues.
- "Speak Up for Health," a 15-minute videotape on transition health issues regarding chronic illness and disabilities as they are experienced by parents and adolescents.
- "Health Care and Transition Planning," a handbook to assist families of adolescents with chronic illness and disabilities in transition health care planning (summer 1992).
- "Speak Up for Health: Independence in Health Care," a health skills workbook for adolescents with developmental disabilities with accompanying health skills checklists.
- "Begin the Between," a transition planning guide for families of adolescents and young adults with disabilities (August 1992).

To order any of the above materials, contact:
PACER Center Inc. • 4826 Chicago Ave. S. • Minneapolis, MN 55417 • (612) 827-2966